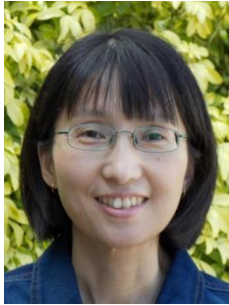


How can we improve Module Evaluation Questionnaires?

by Junko Winch

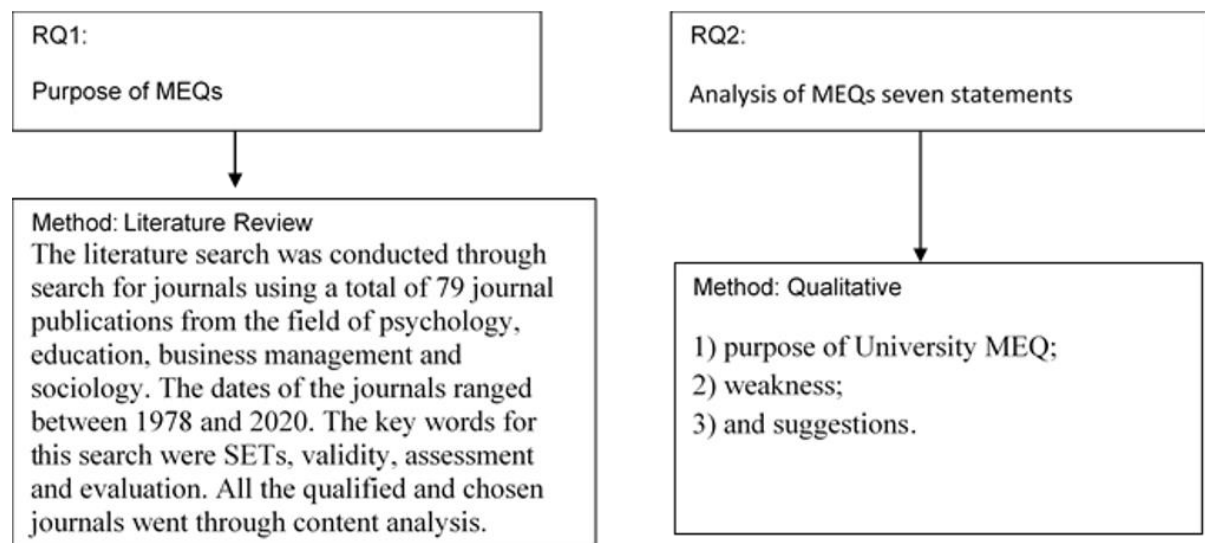


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Module Evaluation Questionnaires (MEQs) are an important source of student feedback on teaching and learning. They are also often relied upon as evidence cases for promotion and teaching. However, in their current form they suffer from low response rates reducing their usefulness and validity. Local practices have grown to address the need for feedback but they are inconsistent year on year or across the university. Existing research on teaching evaluations indicates that there are a source of bias and suggests careful design of MEQs.

The MEQ project

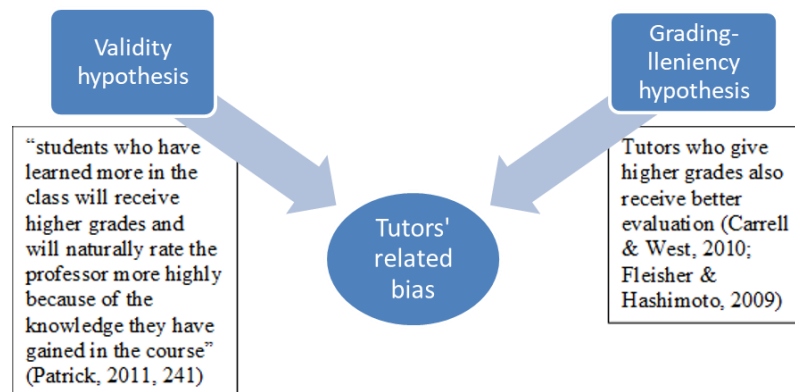
The MEQ project was undertaken to inform the University of Sussex's policy and practice. The output was presented to the University's Surveys Group for their strategic direction of University of Sussex.



Research Questions (RQ) and the corresponding methods

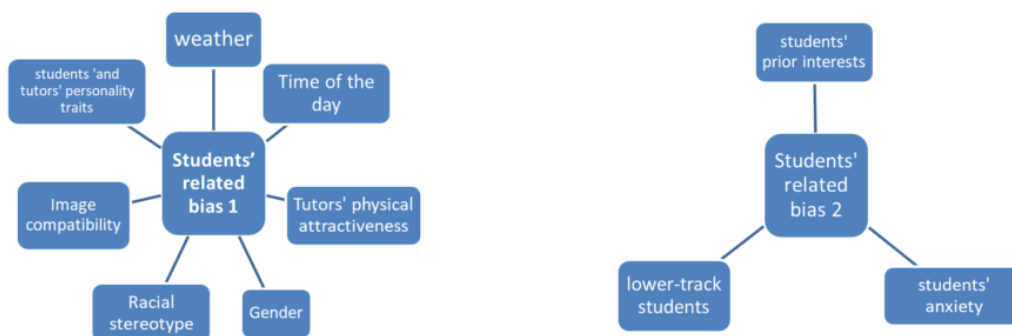
Literature review

The literature review revealed tutors' and students' biases related to MEQs. However, bias is a source of unreliability, which also threatens validity. Validity and reliability are defined in various terms, but for the purpose of this report, validity is defined as "the general term most often used by researchers to judge quality or merit" (Gliner et al., 2009, 102) and reliability as "consistency with which we measure something" (Robson, 2002, 101).



Tutors' related biases

The above figure illustrates two hypotheses affect validity of MEQs due to tutors' related bias. 'Validity hypothesis' is defined "students who have learned more in the class will receive higher grades and will naturally rate the professor more highly because of the knowledge they have gained in the course" (Patrick, 2011, 241). Grading-lenieny hypothesis is that tutors who give higher grades also receive better evaluation (Carrell & West, 2010).



Students' related biases

The above figures summarises 10 factors regarding students' related bias: 1. weather; 2. time of the day; 3. tutors' physical attractiveness; 4. gender; 5. racial stereotype; 6. image compatibility; 7. students' and tutors' personality traits; 8. students' prior interests; 9. students' anxiety and 10. lower-track student.

The findings and recommendations

1. The purpose of MEQs

MEQs have three purposes: institutional, teaching and academic promotion. To help to reduce the bias effects outlined in the literature, full MEQs and other teaching related data should be provided to promotion panels to avoid the cherry picking of comments or data by applicants. For example, quantitative data such as class average attendance rate, average, minimum and maximum marks as well as qualitative response analysis would help build a more accurate overall picture of the class.

2. Analysis of MEQs

Students' biases mentioned in the literature may present difficulty in relying on MEQs as sole instrument. Furthermore, the current MEQ statements may confuse students due their contents and wording.

Following points are suggested:

- Purpose and goal of the questionnaire should be clearly stated. The purpose of the stakeholders should be taken into account when designing the MEQs to ensure that the intended MEQ purpose is achieved.
- Some statements ask two questions in one statement. However, some students may not necessarily answer both questions, which affect validity.
- Consideration should be given to the words such as 'satisfied' which might have different connotations depending on cultures and individuals.

Recommendations

Carefully developed MEQs have potential to offer valuable insights to all stakeholders. The primary recommendation is to undertake a staff-student partnership to agree the purpose of the MEQs and co-design a revised instrument that meets the stated purpose.

Reflections

I have engaged this project as my CPD and appreciate that it has given me various opportunities. I was given an opportunity to write this blog. Giving a presentation to the University Surveys Group reminded me of my doctorate viva as the University Survey Group included Pro Vice Chancellor for Education and Students, Associate Dean of the Business School and the Deputy Pro Vice Chancellor of Student Experience. When answering questions from the University Survey Group, I learned how difficult it is to meet the needs of different perspectives and cultures. For example, I was asked a question from a quality assurance perspective, which was unexpected as I wrote this Report from a teaching staff perspective. The University Survey Group also included Students' Experience team which also made me consider another perspective involving MEQs. Furthermore, working with my colleague from the Business School made me realise the departmental/academic discipline's cultural differences from where I am affiliated (School of Media, Arts and Humanities). Looking back, this was a very valuable experience for me and I will recommend any colleagues who wish to join the DARE Scholarship programme to undertake a similar project.

References

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